

Children, Families & Literacy

Literacy levels in Nunavut remain the lowest in Canada. 50% of the population does not have a high school diploma. 50% of those individuals have less than a Grade 9 education.

One way to break the cycle of low literacy is through family literacy. What exactly is family literacy? Family literacy is the way that families use and show that talking, reading, writing and learning are an important part of life. Family literacy happens naturally in our homes and in our community, every day.

Research indicates that parents can significantly enhance their children's ability to learn by talking and reading to them beginning at infancy and continuing throughout childhood. Children who have had little or no experience with language and printed materials before entering school are at greater risk for not achieving success at school.

Language is the greatest predictor of a child's success in school. A child who does not develop the necessary language skills in the early years is at risk of developing further problems in other areas of learning.

“The evidence is clear that good early child development programs that involve parents or other primary caregivers of young children can influence how they relate to and care for children in the home, and can vastly improve outcomes for children's behavior, learning and health in later life. The earlier in a child's life these programs begin, the better. These programs can benefit children and families from all socioeconomic groups in society.”¹

There are many children in Nunavut who are living in high-risk families. Poverty, low literacy levels, overcrowded housing and parental issues surrounding residential schools are major factors.

Children in particular are vulnerable to risk factors during their early development. Healthy development is at risk when a child's early experiences at home do not provide enough care and secure relationships. Family conflict, violence and alcohol and drug abuse can undermine healthy development. The effects of poverty, teen parenting and inadequate housing can lead to increased family stress.

Very few Inuit families in Nunavut have the financial resources available to provide their children with a literacy rich environment. Books, craft materials and other resources are not an option when there is barely enough to put food on the table. In most communities the local Co-operatives and Northern stores do not carry books due to the high cost and low demand. For unilingual Inuktitut speakers the situation is compounded by the fact that there are very few books and materials published. Programs that increase the literacy levels of parents can reduce the stress on families, dramatically improving the lives of children and their families. Family literacy programs are an excellent way to improve the literacy levels of both parents and children. Family literacy programs are especially effective at engaging adults who would normally be reluctant to participate in literacy programs for themselves.

¹ McCain, Margaret Norrie, Mustard, J. Fraser. The Early Years Study. Final Report. April 1999



Nunavut Literacy Council